

Thornton Finds Balance Between Practice, Pro Bono Work

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RICHARD J. ALLEY | Special to The Daily News

[Laurie Thornton](#) says it was her own experience with paralyzing fear and a sense of helplessness that led her into the pro bono work she does with her law firm, [Glankler Brown PLLC](#), and with Memphis Area Legal Services.

“My personal journey is the reason for supporting the pro bono program and I can relate to what some of these people are going through,” she said. “I know I can’t handle everything they need, but I can listen and give advice and do what I can; and I can even ask the other partners and associates to assist if their problem flows into a different area. Everyone’s been very helpful and willing to help.”

Thornton’s work with MALS has been in the areas of real estate transactions, estate issues and collection matters.

The native Memphian attended Hutchison School before leaving for the University of Tennessee at Knoxville for an undergraduate degree in political science and history. She returned home to attend the Cecil C. Humphrey’s School of Law at the University of Memphis, graduating in 1984.



Thornton (Photo: Lance Murphey)

“I didn’t know what I wanted to do,” she said of her decision after graduating from U.T. “I just sort of gravitated toward it (law school).”

Upon graduating law school she went to work for A C Wharton Jr. in the public defender’s office and then switched to the prosecuting side as an assistant district attorney.

“I wanted to see both sides to get the entire picture,” she said of her move from one side of the aisle to the other. “Going from the public defender’s office, I realized just how green I was and just how sheltered I had been ... I think it helps you get a clearer picture of the need for balance.”

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It was her husband’s job that moved her to Hong Kong and Australia. After her return to the U.S. and a divorce, she took a job with her good friend [Michelle Williams](#) who was practicing real estate law. Shortly after, Williams was diagnosed with leukemia and Thornton took over the practice by herself while Williams underwent treatment.

“It was an extreme learning curve for me because it was either sink or swim,” Thornton said. “She had assembled a wonderful staff so we did that for three years.”

Eventually she was hired by Glankler Brown in September 2007 to practice real estate law and residential closing transactions, a field she loves. Her true joy, however, comes from helping those

in need, an objective heavily promoted by her firm.

“Mr. Glankler was a strong believer in providing the same legal services to everyone, those who can pay and those who can’t, and now Mr. (James) Gilliland has promoted Mr. Glankler’s belief through endowment of the Frank J. Glankler Jr. Pro Bono Award,” Thornton said

The service-based award for charitable work has been presented for three years, an award Thornton is very familiar with it as she’s won it every year.

“I’ve been on the receiving end and I’ve been a needy one, so it’s my turn to give back,” she said, and it’s a philosophy she recommends to those who are in law school and who are new to the profession. “I just think it creates a sense of balance in your practice. There’s a way to help a lot of people that doesn’t take a great amount of your time.”

Outside of work, the mother of three enjoys cooking and reading as well as finding time to work with the Episcopal Church Home Trust, Hutchison School Alumni Association, Memphis and Tennessee Bar Associations, Commercial Real Estate Women (CREW), Junior League of Memphis and Foster Care Review Board among others.